



THE SEHS NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402

Vol. 23, No. 2

From Arthur Howe:

Dear Members:

I AM PLEASED TO invite you to The South End Historical Society's first exhibit, *Down Washington Street: Visions of Past, Present, and Future*, in the Old State House Museum on the mall at State Street. The exhibit is a collaboration between The South End Historical Society and The Bostonian Society. It will be at the museum until April 1995.

Original research has gone into the first major exhibit about Washington Street. It covers the history of the street in the South End and expands into several thematic areas to help us understand the complexity of this thoroughfare that has been so important to the history of Boston and the South End. We hope to pursue these ideas in greater detail in the future.

We will host a reception on Friday, May 20th at the Old State House from 5:30 - 7:30 pm. I hope to see you there. ✦

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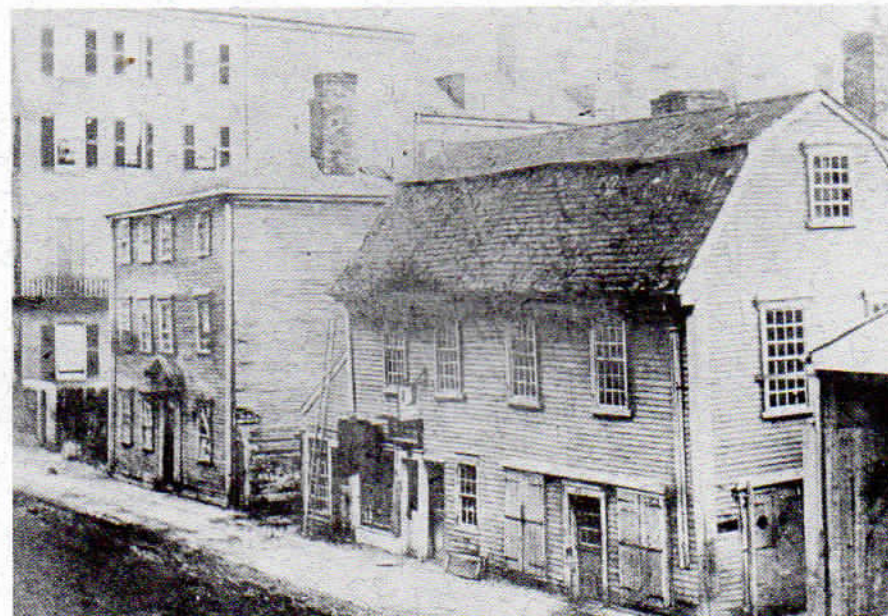


TODAY'S VICTORIAN STYLE SOUTH END

ALTHOUGH ONLY TWO frame buildings remain in the South End, the important Federal and Colonial style eras of the region's history will live once again for the city of Boston in the Down Washington Street exhibit, which opened in the Old State House Museum on May 7. People who associate the South End with long streets of brick row houses and masonry construction will be surprised to see the intricate

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photos: left, SPNEA; below, The Bostonian Society



AN EARLIER ERA OF COLONIAL, GEORGIAN, AND FEDERAL STYLE HOUSES ON WASHINGTON STREET

The South End Historical Society Celebrates its 28th Year

Yankees in the South End

by Emily Domurad, from research by John Neale

VISIONS OF THE PAST, one segment of The South End Historical Society's major, three-part exhibit on Washington Street, currently on view at the Old State House Museum, examines the thoroughfare over the past 200 years. Visions of the Past tells the story of a street that has been central to the history of Boston since its earliest

days when it grew from a water-swept path to a grand approach to the city, only to struggle for existence under the elevated Orange Line.

Until the eighteenth century Boston was a peninsula. A narrow causeway coming from Roxbury was the only approach to the city by land, and at high tide even the

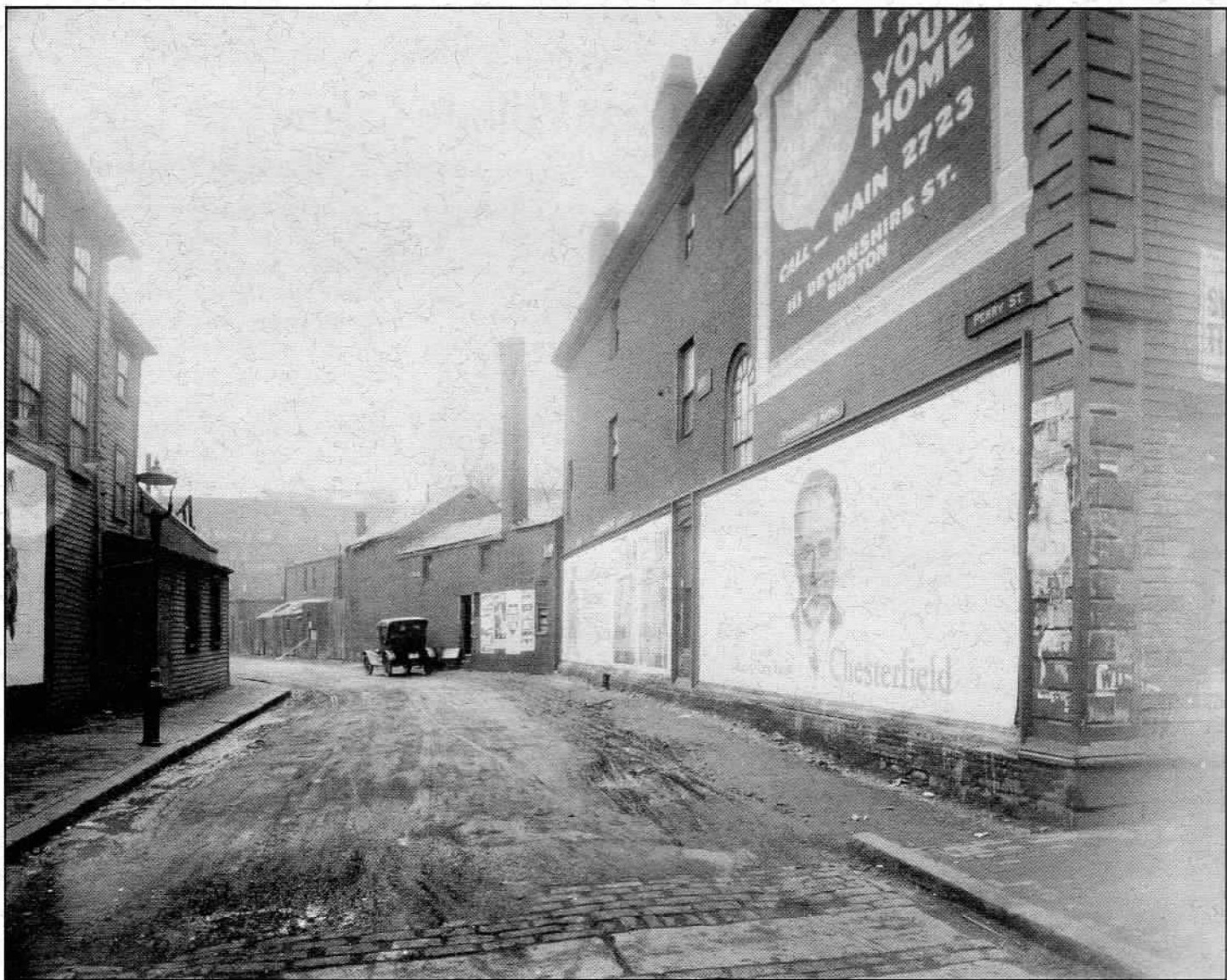


photo: courtesy of SPNEA

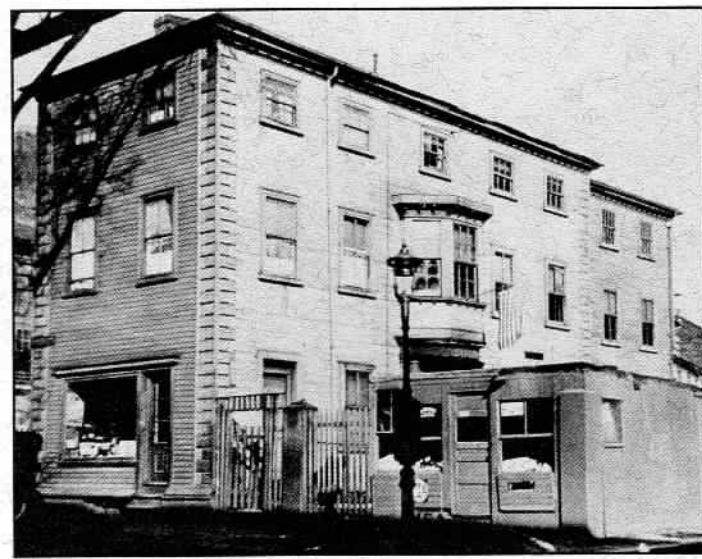
CORNER OF WASHINGTON AND PERRY STREETS. ON THE RIGHT IS THE BACK OF THE AMASA DAVIS HOUSE AT 1234 WASHINGTON STREET. INTERIOR VIEW OF ARCHED WINDOW ON THE SECOND-FLOOR STAIRWAY CAN BE SEEN ON PAGE 4. HAND-CARVED QUOINS AT CORNER OF HOUSE WERE SALVAGED WHEN BUILDING WAS DESTROYED.

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Receipt of *The SEHS Newsletter* is a privilege of membership in The Historical Society, an association of people interested in the recognition and preservation of historic resources in, and recording the history of, the South End of Boston. Individual membership is \$15 per year; family and dual memberships are \$25.

Officers: Arthur F. Howe, President
Susan Park, Treasurer
Barbara Anderson, Secretary

Editing and Design
Emily Domurad



GARDEN APPROACH OF THE HOUSE BUILT BY AMASA DAVIS AT THE CORNER OF WASHINGTON AND PERRY STREETS

causeway disappeared. Every other route to Boston required a boat. That narrow strip of land called the Neck eventually became Washington Street. With 150 years of extraordinary development, the same ocean-swept path would become, for years, the only, wide, straight street in Boston, known for some of the city's prettiest houses and gardens as well as the fountains on its fence-enclosed squares.

Visions of the Past illustrates an older South End than the one existing today when only two frame buildings remain in the neighborhood. The 150 years of development that gave the region 600 acres of Victorian style brick row-houses were preceded by another 150 years that determined the essential character of Washington Street as the backbone of the South End and a grand approach to the city.

The history of the South End begins with the history of the city of Boston in about 1635. Boston was easily fortified by closing off the Neck and setting up a set of gates with the intent of keeping out wild animals and Indians and, later on, the British. Some of the first people to live out on the Neck were troops during the Revolutionary War. The foundation of a fort stands at the corner of Washington and East Berkeley Streets in front of Harry the Greek's as does the actual Boston Neck, only about 100 feet wide. Taverns sprung up along the Neck. A very famous one, the George Tavern, stood where the Mandela apartments are today.

NOT ALL SHOE MERCHANTS

THE FIRST PEOPLE to get land out on the Neck went to the city in about 1710 when a grant was made from Beach Street down to today's East Berkeley Street, originally called Dover Street. Many of these original proprietors were Yankee traders who knew each other from their stores on Long Wharf, owned West India companies and were heavily involved in Boston politics. The city gave the land to proprietors in exchange for their willingness to build dikes and hold off water that washed over the Neck up to the horses' knees, cutting Boston off from the mainland. The city may not have considered the land to be particularly valuable, however the selectmen of the city, granting themselves land, began a pattern of real estate speculation that continued into

the 1980s.

One of the first uses of the land was for brick factories. Joshua Weatherly minted the first coins for the United States out on the Neck. Colonel John May settled on the Neck after forming the Ohio Company to open a new western territory for trade. An influential politician, his journals are well-known among Ohioans. In the late 1700s Yankee families settled this whole section of the Neck with early Federal style houses and wharfs.

In 1785 a group from the North Side of Dover Street petitioned the city to purchase a larger piece of land that extended from the old fort to the parcel where the Holy Cross Cathedral stands today. Among these proprietors were men like Amasa Davis, a quartermaster general during the Revolution. He and many of the original settlers of the neck shared a similar profile: Revolutionary War figure, prosperous merchant, attended the Boston Tea Party, was a Son of Liberty and sat on the Boston Board of Selectmen. Politically active friends and neighbors formed a tightly knit, enterprising little neighborhood along the water-soaked stretch of new road that had been barely claimed from the sea. They were prosperous West India merchants, all of them, who wanted to have their houses and some little stores outside of Boston proper in what was essentially Boston's first suburb. The proprietors built dikes and fences, civilizing the piece of the neck that was still a wild stretch of land with a great many marshes and a reputation as a good place to go hunting.

Their houses were early wood-framed structures with old-fashioned six-over-six pane windows. Spaced regularly along Washington Street, the houses had sheds in back. Often families built a store and lived across the street from it, or typically the store was on the first floor, and they lived upstairs.

William Porter, a distiller, also on the Board of Selectmen, purchased a piece of land from the city and built a pair of back-to-back, father-and-son houses. Mirror images of each other, these are the oldest documented houses surviving in the South End. Upstairs, Federal style detail still remains including mantelpieces, window trim, stair banisters, and a few pieces of hand-printed wallpaper.

The Amasa Davis house was a striking survivor until it was demolished in 1924. The house was dismantled, and parts of it have been stored with the same care that Amasa Davis built it. Visitors entered the house through a garden on the side. The kitchen was in back and a stable beyond, following the most common form of laying out a house in the late 1700s. Houses facing the street did not become popular until 1815-20. Having the entrance on the side with a garden approach was a technique imported perhaps from Holland, allowing people to compose themselves before they entered the house. A rounded window graced the staircase, and wood quoins decorated the corners of the house, imitating carved stone. Pilasters flanking the entryway and a very pretty fanlight over the door were perfect examples of the Federal style. Details in the house's cornice moldings and delicate decorative work using elements from classical orders have led some people to speculate at the end of the nineteenth century that the house was designed by Charles Bulfinch, but no documentation exists. ✦

Yankee Village Lives in Visions of Past

(Continued from Page 1)

craftsmanship of this first neighborhood of houses and stores built by early Yankee families that created a varied streetscape along Washington Street for more than 150 years. Written history, a documentary film, photographs, old maps, and plans with measured drawings and artifacts will paint a picture in this show about the Neck that few people today would guess ever existed. Elegant, stylish houses and vernacular Colonial style houses along the Neck celebrated a place that people chose to make their home, employing a level of craftsmanship and detail that made the area as fashionable as any other part of the city before the bow fronts were built.

ARTIFACTS LONG FORGOTTEN

RESEARCH FOR THE exhibit has yielded some exciting and important artifacts. Chief among them are fragments of the Amasa Davis house, which have been in the care of The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) since the house was demolished in the late 1920s. The Amasa Davis house was dismantled with almost as much care as Amasa Davis built it in the eighteenth century. William Sumner Appleton, president of SPNEA, had the foresight to salvage a number of fragments when the house was torn down. A concern for late Colonial and Early American style architecture already existed at the time the

photo: courtesy of SPNEA



STAIRWAY OF THE THE INTRICATELY DETAILED AMASA DAVIS HOUSE SHOWS WOODEN STAIR ENDS, FRAGMENTS THAT APPEAR IN VISION OF THE PAST GALLERY. THIS WINDOW OVERLOOKED PERRY STREET, AS SEEN IN PHOTOGRAPH ON PAGE 2.



photo: courtesy of The Bostonian Society

A VIDEO IN THE EXHIBITION TRACES THE DEMOLITION OF THE ELEVATED TRACK.

building was dismantled. Impressed by early architects and architectural historians who were interested in saving whatever they could of the building, Sumner maintained the doorway surround, the pilasters and columns that supported the portico, the arched window from the second floor, and a number of interior details. These include a stair end, plaster molding, a doorknob, and a number of small pieces. Many fragments were too large to feature in the exhibit, but a pilaster capital and a stair end are included. The fragments are stored in Newbury and Haverhill, Massachusetts.

In addition, the exhibit will include measured drawings by Frank C. Bourne. With the drawings, fragments, and numerous photographs, a fairly comprehensive portrait of the house has survived.

Many artifacts and objects have emerged as the exhibit planners sifted through the history of the street, including Boston Housing Authority drawings and photographs of the construction of the Cathedral Housing Development. One particular gem is a photograph of the first family entering their house in the new development.

THE EL GOING UP AND COMING DOWN

ONE OF THE videos that will be running in the gallery is by Filmmaker Timothy Wright. It traces the demolition of the elevated.

ORIGINAL FLOOR PLANS AND DRAWINGS

ON DISPLAY:

- I. Architect Nathaniel J. Bradlee's drawings of South End houses and the demolished Continental block
- II. An original floor plan of the Deacon House by Gridley J. Fox Bryant and Jean Lemoulnier, loaned by Mrs. Austin T. Gray
- III. An early print of the British fortifications along the Neck

WALKING TOURS IN JUNE

THE EXHIBIT HAS provided a written and visual forum for the planners' own research, giving them an opportunity to assemble information from many different collections. Eager to share the knowledge they have gained, and not only in the galleries, they are offering programs that will bring people to Washington Street for tours, talks, bicycle rides, and other activities.

The South End Historical Society, in collaboration with The Bostonian Society, will be offering a series of walking tours of Washington Street on weekends in June (See page 8 for schedule of events). Special tours will be offered for schools, institutions, and groups in the neighborhood. Kimberly A. Shilland, curator of the exhibit, and Kathy Kottaridis, head of education at The Bostonian Society, hope to offer bicycle



rides and lunch-time power walks for the hospital community as well as a trivia hunt for children to help them develop visual awareness and accuracy. They would like to host a forum for South End residents in the fall and use the exhibit to begin a vigorous oral history project by including other groups in the South End such as the Inquilinos Boricuas En Acción (IBA), the Boston Center for the Arts (BCA), and the United South End Settlements.

Their goal is to give people the opportunity to walk along the street and talk about the area with guides who know the exhibit and can draw parallels, using the research that has gone into the exhibit, in assessing what is now on Washington Street and what people hope will be there in the future. James G. Kostaras, Senior Architectural Planner at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and Neil Levitt of Stull and Lee, Architects have helped to gather visual materials to express ideas for the future of the street regarding transportation, beautification, and ways to restore Washington Street as an important thoroughfare that will complement the neighborhood. ✦

photo: courtesy of SPNEA



THE AMASA DAVIS HOUSE ON WASHINGTON STREET, DEMOLISHED IN THE LATE 1920s, WAS SO STRIKING A HOUSE THAT IT WAS DISMANTLED ALMOST WITH THE SAME CARE THAT IT WAS BUILT. VISITORS ENTERED THROUGH A SIDE GARDEN. PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THE ORIGINAL SASH AND GREEK REVIVAL STYLE DOORWAY.

William D. Harrigan, Jr.

APRIL 1 WAS a day of loss for all South Enders and especially the family and friends of Bill Harrigan. William D. Harrigan died of cancer on Good Friday in his home on West Brookline Street. By his side were his wife Nola and his sons Adam and Dan. Bill was 50 years old.

William D. Harrigan, Jr. has been a long-time South Ender. He moved to the South End in 1972. He and Nola made their first home on East Springfield Street and started their family in 1972 with the arrival of their son Adam. With the expansion of their family, they moved to a house on West Concord Street and eventually renovated their current home on West Brookline Street.

Bill was born in Arlington and graduated from the Lexington Schools. He earned a degree from Tufts University and a Masters in Business from Boston University. Bill's parents William and Laura Harrigan live in Lexington, Massachusetts.

Bill was a real estate investor and the former owner of Greater Boston Properties. He was a member of The South

End Historical Society, the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, and the Pilot Block Neighborhood Association.

His was a short but full life. Bill and Nola spent any free weekends at the home they built in Vermont. He skied on his winter weekends and enjoyed the fruits of Nola's garden in the summer. With sons Adam at Elmira College and Dan at Holderness, there were always activities to attend and visits to the schools for sports and other events. Bill enjoyed traveling — from Venezuela to visit friends, to France for skiing, and driving across the country to Alaska.

Bill was well-known and liked by all who knew him. He was a very quiet and private person but always had a pleasant word for everyone. He was well-respected in his business and personal life, and we will all miss him.

Funeral Mass was held St. Brigid's Church in Lexington, the same church in which Bill and Nola were married. Memorial contributions may be made to Good Samaritan Hospice, 310 Allston Street, Brighton, Massachusetts 02146. ♦ *Karen Parker*

C a l e n d a r

First Tuesday of every month:

South End Landmarks Commission
Room 801, Boston City Hall
4 pm; public invited
For more information, call (617) 635-3850

Second Thursday of every month:

The South End Historical Society
Board Meeting
Francis Dane House
532 Massachusetts Avenue
7:45 pm

COMING EVENTS:

Thursday, June 2

The South End Historical Society
Annual Meeting and
Election of New Officers and Directors
The Francis Dane House
532 Massachusetts Avenue
7:45 pm
Reception to follow; RSVP by Thursday, May 26,
536-4445

Saturday, October 22

10 am – 5 pm

Twenty-sixth South End House Tour

Sponsored by The South End Historical Society
Tour of Private Homes in the Historic South End

November 1994 and
March 1995

Saturday, November 19 and March 18

11 am – 6 pm

Sunday, November 20 and March 19

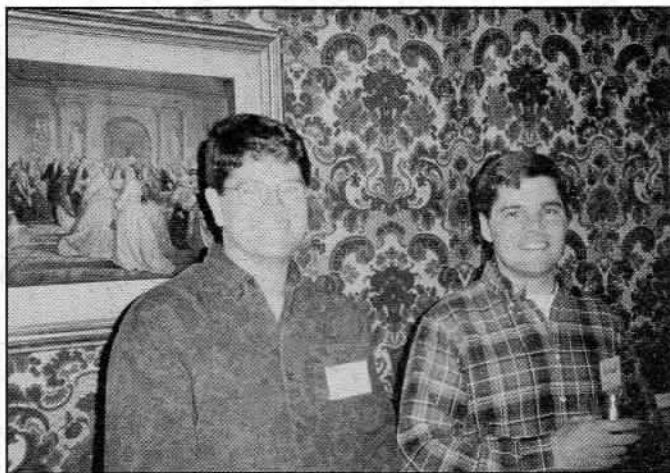
11 am – 6 pm

Cyclorama Flea Market of Antiques and
Collectibles
Over 100 dealers

Cyclorama, Boston Center for the Arts
539 Tremont Street, Boston

Admission: \$5; \$4 with coupon
For more information, call 536-4445

NEWS • AND • EVENTS



NEW MEMBERS JIM OLIVER AND DON WUNDER ATTENDED THE TWELFTH NIGHT RECEPTION ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5.



FLAUTIST CYNTHIA WOOLEY, CELLIST AUGUSTINE RODRIGUEZ, AND VIOLINIST PETER HUGHES — THE INTERNATIONAL TRIO PLAYED HAYDEN.

—New Members—

David Dennett
 Betsy Egan
 Patrick F. Joyce, Jr.
 Michael L. Kyes
 Brian Woodward Lachell
 Jay F. Littell
 Janis Lucian
 Cathy and Scott MacFarlane
 John C. Meeks
 Bob Minnocci
 Wayne J. Mitchell
 Gregory Morse
 Anthony Roncalli, Esq.
 Lynda and Ron Rosen
 Doris A. Sasser
 Ms. Tracey Smith
 Mary Snyder
 Mr. Bradford Sprogis
 Kevin E. Thomas
 Siobhan K. Whalen
 Eileen White

Welcome

Greet A New Neighbor with a Membership To The SEHS

BECOME A PART of the effort to preserve the South End, one of Boston's most unique and important neighborhoods, by joining The South End Historical Society. Your dollars and membership will help us achieve our objective of preserving the physical fabric and interpreting the history of the South End for present and future generations.

Newsletters, publications, programs, tours, and numerous other activities are all part of The South End Historical Society. We hope you will support our neighborhood by joining our society and becoming part of these activities.

name or
 names _____

address _____

zip _____

telephone _____

full-time student...	\$10.00
individual	\$15.00
family/dual	\$25.00
patron	\$75.00
life (indiv.)	\$300.00
additional	
contribution	\$25.00
.....	\$50.00
.....	\$100.00
total	\$

Please make checks payable to The South End Historical Society. All contributions are tax deductible.

Down Washington Street: Visions of the Past, Present, and Future

ONE OF BOSTON'S most important thoroughfares and its vital role in the South End's development is the subject of an exhibit held at the Old State House Museum from May 7, 1994 – April 1995. The exhibit has been organized by The South End Historical Society (SEHS) and The Bostonian Society (TBS).

OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, May 20 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
Old State House Museum

PROGRAMS

Reservations recommended; call 720-3291 or 720-3292
Members TBS & SEHS \$4; Non-members \$5

WALKING TOURS

Tours meet at the Boston Center for the Arts Plaza
539 Tremont Street 2 pm

Saturday	June 4	Historic Washington Street
Sunday	June 5	Blackstone and Franklin Parks
Saturday	June 11	Historic Washington Street
Saturday	June 18	Architecture of Washington Street

LECTURES

Old State House Museum 6 pm

Wednesday, June 1, 1994

A New Look at an Old Thoroughfare:
Washington Street in the South End

Kimberly Alexander Shilland
Curator



Wednesday, June 15, 1994

Great Houses of the South End

John Neale
Board Member
The South End Historical Society

All fees will help defray the cost of the exhibition.
Send check, payable to The Bostonian Society,
206 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02109 ♦

Members: a reminder—don't forget to send in your membership renewal.



U. S. Postage
Non-Profit Org.

PAID

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BOSTON, MASS.

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